The Last Days of the Mosquito Reservation: The Mosquito Indian Diplomatic Mission to Restore the Mosquito Reservation, 1894–1907

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Abstract. Geopolitical changes taking place in late nineteenth-century Central America laid the pathway for Nicaragua's long-desired incorporation of the autonomous Mosquito Reservation, which was located on its Caribbean Coast. This article brings to light the diplomatic mission undertaken by Mosquito Indians to restore their reservation using rarely accessed British Foreign Office documents. These sources detail the extensive efforts by the last hereditary chief, Robert Henry Clarence, and a small number of Mosquito delegates living in exile in Jamaica, to persuade Great Britain to restore the autonomy granted to them under the Treaty of Managua (1860). Mosquito appeals for British support drew on notions of shared Anglo culture owing to their long historical association with the British and their conversion to Protestant Christianity from the 1840s. The discussion of Mosquito diplomatic correspondence reveals that they possessed a much more sophisticated understanding of notions of nationhood and international law than is commonly acknowledged. The Mosquitos' association with the British, which had indeed been empowering during the early nineteenth century, proved to be entirely disempowering as the century drew to a close. The establishment of US hegemony over the isthmus had radically transformed Central America's diplomatic landscape and had undermined Britain's ability to intervene on behalf of the Mosquito.

Keywords. Mosquito Reservation, Chief Robert Henry Clarence, Nicaragua, Treaty of Managua, Sam Pitts Rebellion

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leaders of the Mosquito Indians began efforts to restore the Mosquito Reservation on what is today's Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Having fled to Jamaica as a consequence of Nicaragua's military incorporation of the reservation in 1894,

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a small group of Mosquito Indians undertook a little-known diplomatic mission to persuade Great Britain to pressure Nicaragua into observing the Treaty of Managua (1860). While the treaty had recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the territory, it nonetheless guaranteed the Mosquito Indians substantial political and economic autonomy within the boundaries of a newly formed Mosquito Reservation. During their exile in Jamaica, Chief Robert Henry Clarence and three Mosquito delegates became the main protagonists in the restoration efforts of the Mosquito people. Despite their sustained efforts, their mission ended in failure, when Britain and Nicaragua signed the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty (1905), which formally recognized the reservation's full incorporation into the Republic of Nicaragua.

Rarely accessed Foreign Office files held in the British National Archives preserve original correspondence written by Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates. These accounts reveal a sophisticated strategy that mobilized an understanding of non-Indigenous notions of treaty law and sovereignty in the pursuit of the Mosquitos' restoration cause. However, the Mosquitos' deployment of such non-Indigenous concepts reveals a contradictory strategy. The Mosquito sought to undercut the colonizing pretentions of Nicaragua by drawing on political and cultural resources that had themselves been introduced by another colonizing actor, Great Britain.

The ability of the Mosquito to navigate "between empires" to their own advantage has been well documented by authors examining Mosquito history (Hale 1994; Offen 2002; Williams 2013). Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates appear to have continued this well-established strategy. Being dependent on any imperial power for protection clearly carried risks for the Mosquito. As will be seen from the following discussion, in the context of the newly established republics of Central America, which sought to establish their territorial integrity over the whole isthmus, accepting British protection suggests a pragmatic appraisal of the emerging political environment. Whatever its limitations, the strategy seemed the best available option. Mosquito-British relations were long standing and generally experienced as positive by both sides. Furthermore, Britain's willingness to intervene on behalf of their Mosquito allies on numerous occasions seems to confirm the merits of the Mosquito placing themselves under British protection. With the rise of the United States as the regional hegemonic power, however, the continuing reliance on Britain under such changed circumstances proved to be badly misplaced and ultimately disempowering. Once British protection was withheld, the Mosquito had no recourse to any other resources, diplomatic or military, to protect their interests.

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The Kingdom of Mosquitia (1687–1860)

European contact with the Mosquito Coast began during the seventeenth century with predominantly British settlers engaging in informal commerce with the Indigenous Mosquito-speaking population of Central America's Caribbean Coast (Mendiola 2019: 624). British settlers also introduced a population of enslaved Africans who formed the antecedent of large and politically important Afro-descendant Creole settlements along the coast from the nineteenth century onward (Gabbert 2011: 13). Although growing contact between the British and Mosquito Indians led to Britain crowning a Mosquito king and granting him a royal commission in 1687, relations remained informal with no official alliance between the two actors.

The status of the Mosquitia as a unified state-like kingdom has been the subject of rigorous academic research. Mary Helms (1986) suggested that the region formed a patchwork of fractious fiefdoms ruled by "big men" who took on titles such as "kings," "admirals," "generals," and "governors." These competing big men facilitated British interests along the Mosquito Coast by mediating relations between Mosquito villages and the British in return for high-status manufactured goods which were distributed among local allies to sustain their leadership status (Helms 1986: 508). Others have noted that these divisions were underpinned by ethnic differences. Miscegenation with escaped African slaves and Amerindians led to the emergence of Sambo Mosquito communities located north of the Wangki River, ruled by a "general" and "king." Tawira Mosquito communities located south of the Wangki River remained isolated from the African population, and were governed by an "admiral" and a "governor" (Offen 2002: 334–35). When Britain ceded the Mosquitia to Spain in 1783 and withdrew from the region, competition between Mosquito leaders for Spanish patronage coalesced in 1791 into a civil war that almost wiped out the Tawira (Williams 2013).

Daniel Mendiola (2019: 621) rejects the narrative of an ethnically divided warring kingdom, observing that close cooperation between district leaders, rather than British patronage, enabled the Kingdom of Mosquitia to evolve into a powerful confederation by the early eighteenth century. These political arrangements began to erode as regional leaders engaged in individual diplomatic initiatives with both Britain and Spain, leading to mutual distrust regardless of ethnic monikers. Contacts between individual Mosquito leaders and imperial Spanish representatives raised suspicions that such initiatives constituted a plot to gain overall commercial or military advantage, leading to the civil war in 1790–91 (642). While the Sambo king emerged from the conflict as the dominant Mosquito leader, cooperation

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between district leaders had dissipated, resulting in a permanent decline in Mosquito military power and internal cohesion. Nevertheless, with Spain making no attempt to establish direct rule over the Kingdom of Mosquitia, the Mosquito were able to remain "fiercely independent" (619).

This perspective not only challenges those approaches that see Mosquito ethnic divisions as critical in understanding the internal politics of the kingdom, it also undermines the established narrative that links Mosquito autonomy to their alliance with Great Britain (620). Mosquito autonomy appears to have been generated internally by the confederative nature of Indigenous political structures that reduced the incidence of internal conflicts between district leaders, enabling military resources to be directed outward beyond the kingdom, making it a formidable actor in its own right.

The Mosquito Reservation (1860–1894)

The sudden collapse of the Spanish empire in 1821 and the lack of any coherent independence movement among Central America's divided Mestizo elites led to decades of internecine civil wars. This situation was exploited by the British who returned to the Mosquitia and declared a British protectorate. The move immediately created friction with the United States, which was aggressively expanding its control over the isthmus to facilitate the construction of a US-controlled interoceanic canal. Keen to avoid a possible conflict, Britain and the United States signed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850, which prohibited them from engaging in military interventions or establishing protectorates in Central America (Brown 1991). With Britain's Mosquito protectorate incompatible with its new treaty obligations, prolonged negotiations with Nicaragua led to the signing of the Treaty of Managua (1860). The new treaty abolished the Kingdom of Mosquitia and recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Coast. Nicaragua agreed to respect the autonomy of a geographically smaller Mosquito Reservation in which the Mosquito Indians' maintained the right to self-government. The king, whose title was changed to hereditary chief, presided as a symbolic figurehead over governing General and Executive Councils. With its new constitution adopting the "Laws of England," the reservation era saw the complete transition to thoroughly non-Indigenous governing political institutions. Furthermore, with the exclusion of Cabo Gracias a Dios and the Wangki River from the reservation's boundaries, the majority of the Mosquito population were located outside its jurisdiction (see Oertzen, Rossbach, and Wünderich 1990: 315–17).

Despite treaty guarantees, Nicaragua encroached upon reservation affairs by challenging the Mosquito government's right to grant business

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concessions and levy taxes. Nicaragua claimed an "inherent right" as the sovereign power "to regulate the maritime import and export trade and the duties that ought to be levied" (Kahle and Potthast 1983: 44). It also rejected the election of Hereditary Chief William Henry Clarence in 1866, claiming he had been elected by non-Indigenous "foreign" Creoles (52). Responding to Nicaraguan antagonism, Chief William Clarence unexpectedly committed to pursuing Mosquitian nationhood in his inaugural address to the general council. Although this notion was quickly stifled by Britain, the chief's intent gives an indication of the strong anti-Nicaraguan sentiments that had emerged during the reservation era.

Nicaraguan hostility toward the reservation, as well as its increasing physical presence along the reservation's boundaries, acted as a principal factor behind the Mosquito's adoption of Anglo-cultural affinities (Hale 1994; Gabbert 2010). In rejecting a Nicaraguan proposal for the reservation's full incorporation in 1877, for example, Chief William Clarence underlined the cultural incompatibility with "Spaniard" Nicaraguans given the Mosquito's embrace of English laws, customs, and the Protestant faith that underpinned the reservation's orderly government (see Oertzen, Rossbach, and Wünderich 1990: 349).

The perception of Nicaragua as an external threat played an important role in the rapid spread of Protestant Christianity, which was a marked feature of the reservation era. Moravian missionaries arrived on the Mosquitia in 1849 and initially reported resistance to their Christianizing efforts owing to the condemnation of many traditional Mosquito practices, such as shamanism and polygamy. Despite their paternalistic views of the Mosquito, Moravian missionaries nonetheless provided important cultural resources through which both the Afro-descendant Creole and Indigenous population of the Mosquitia could resist the "Spaniard" culture borne by Nicaraguans (Hale 1994: 49). This explains why Nicaragua's encroachment on reservation affairs led to an exponential grow in the Moravian congregation, culminating in a mass conversion known as the "Great Awakening" in 1881 (40). The Moravians' elaboration of the first script of the Mosquito language, together with the adoption of a work ethic and a strict code of behavior, formed distinctive cultural markers which granted the Moravian congregation a strong sense of internal cohesion and moral superiority which accentuated the sense of difference from Nicaraguan Mestizos (Gabbert 2010).

The reservation era experienced a radical change in relations between the inhabitants of the Mosquitia and the Spanish-speaking Catholic Mestizo population of what had become Nicaragua. Relatively genial informal relations between the powerful Kingdom of Mosquitia and the Spanish

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Empire had been replaced by a legally constituted reservation governed by non-Indigenous institutions and inhabited by a Protestant and culturally Anglo population that viewed Nicaraguans as a dangerous cultural Other.

In an attempt to address Nicaragua's continuous challenges to the Treaty of Managua, Britain sought international arbitration by the Emperor of Austria. In 1881, the arbitration process concluded that Nicaraguan sovereignty was limited by the "self-government conceded to the Mosquito Indians" by the treaty. The arbitration also confirmed that the Mosquito government held exclusive rights to grant concessions and raise taxes within the reservation. Furthermore, the arbitration committee confirmed Britain's extensive rights to intervene on behalf of the Mosquito as a signatory to the treaty.[1] With this clarification of the reservation's autonomous status, US investments increased rapidly and extensive banana, rubber, gold mining, and lumbering enterprises were established (Healy 1981: 22).

This commercial success only added to Nicaragua's ambitions to incorporate the reservation, which were also encouraged by regular complaints by the United States over lingering British influence in what was now clearly a center of North American enterprise. Bluefields' North American residents also made frequent complaints to Nicaragua about the lack of public investment by the reservation government, disclosing their deeply racist views on the Creole-dominated executive council (Oertzen, Rossbach, and Wünderich 1990: 74–77). With the election of the nationalist president José Santos Zelaya in 1893, who viewed the reservation's prosperous economy as a potential source of finance for his Liberal Revolution of national modernization, Nicaragua's military annexation of the reservation seemed increasingly inevitable (Offen 2004: 82).

The Incorporation (1894)

In February 1894, Nicaraguan troops landed in Bluefields and occupied all government buildings in response to rumors of an impending invasion by Honduras. Despite written protests from Chief Robert Henry Clarence that the occupation breached the Treaty of Managua, Nicaragua declared martial law and cynically misrepresented Chief Clarence's protests as traitorous sympathies for Honduras to justify the decision. On 25 February, British Consul Herbert Bingham arrived on board HMS *Cleopatra* and negotiated the evacuation of Nicaraguan troops to Greytown given the lack of any resistance from the local population. Negotiations to establish a provisional government were terminated when the *Cleopatra* was relieved by HMS *Canada* whose orders were restricted to protecting British lives

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and property. As the Mosquito were not British subjects, this effectively excluded any intervention on their behalf.

The fragile peace prevailing in Bluefields broke down completely on 5 July, when Creole police officers arrived at Government House demanding overdue wages and were attacked by Nicaraguan soldiers. In retaliation, armed Creoles fired on Government House during the night, forcing the surrender of the Nicaraguan commissioner. Given the vacuum of authority enveloping Bluefields, local residents asked Chief Clarence to resume his position and restore order. The following day the Nicaraguan commissioner and a handful of soldiers withdrew from the city in what was generally seen by all sides as a humiliating defeat for Nicaragua.[2] The restoration of the reservation government proved short lived, however, as large numbers of Nicaraguan troops returned in August and occupied the city. With Nicaragua now in full control of the reservation, Chief Clarence boarded the British warship HMS *Mohawk* and sailed into exile.

As the Treaty of Managua stated that the reservation's incorporation could only be achieved through the voluntary consent of the Mosquito Indians, a Mosquito Convention was convened in November where Indian headmen signed a decree of incorporation. Although the British vice-consul in Bluefields was informed by delegates to the convention that they had been coerced into giving their consent, Nicaragua triumphantly declared the reservation's full incorporation into the Republic of Nicaragua.[3]

Exile and Diplomacy: Chief Robert Henry Clarence and the Mosquito Delegates

The incorporation of the Mosquito Reservation caused a flurry of diplomatic activity between Nicaragua, Great Britain, and the United States. It also led to less well-known diplomatic moves by the Mosquito, with headmen, Chief Clarence, and Mosquito delegates petitioning Britain to enforce the Treaty of Managua. No detailed examination has been undertaken of this Mosquito diplomacy, despite the existence of substantial correspondence outlining the case made by the Mosquito to the British government. As the following review of this correspondence reveals, despite the pejorative views held by British and Nicaraguan diplomats toward the Mosquito Indians, the Mosquito petitioners demonstrate an extensive knowledge of their rights under the Treaty of Managua and the Award of the Arbitration of the Emperor of Austria, which enabled them to mount an articulate diplomatic campaign.

With Britain having already withdrawn from Central America after the signing of the Treaty of Managua, Mosquito diplomacy faced a set of

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inauspicious circumstances. The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty also prohibited Britain from engaging in any actions, military or diplomatic, that could be interpreted as establishing or maintaining a protectorate. More importantly, perhaps, the incorporation was by then a de facto reality, and Nicaragua had a decree of incorporation signed by Mosquito headmen which at least on paper suggested the Indians had consented to this. Despite these circumstances, correspondence shows how the Mosquito navigated this hostile terrain, portraying Nicaragua's actions as a breach of its treaty obligations and dismissing any notion of Mosquito voluntary consent for incorporation, while also courting British sympathies by appealing to their shared Anglo culture.

An early example of the Mosquito diplomatic strategy can be observed in correspondence addressed to British Consul Herbert Bingham by James Willis Cuthbert and Charles Patterson, two long-serving members of the Mosquito government, regarding their expulsion from Bluefields: "We consider our treatment unjust and unprecedented when a treaty and award existed. It is against international law, and we cannot believe that Her Majesty's Government will tolerate such indifference on the part of the Nicaraguan Government."[4] In a separate petition, Charles Patterson expresses his regret that on the false pretext that Chief Clarence had rebelled against the sovereignty of Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan government violated the "solemn Treaty of Managua of the 28 January, 1860, between Her Majesty and the Republic of Nicaragua, and has made a forcible incorporation of the district assigned to the Mosquito Indians." Stating that the Mosquito Indians have quietly governed themselves according to the "stipulations of the IIIrd article of the said treaty," he totally rejects any incorporation or "closer connections with Nicaragua."[5]

A more detailed and legalistic appraisal of Nicaragua's infringements of its international obligations was presented in a joint statement submitted by Chief Clarence, Cuthbert, and Patterson, which draws directly on specific articles contained in the 1881 Award of the Emperor of Austria. In the submission, the chief and his two advisers point out that international arbitration had affirmed Nicaraguan sovereignty over the reservation to be "limited by the self-government conceded to the Mosquito Indians by the Treaty of Managua" and had no right to station troops or occupy any part of the reservation. While they acknowledge that the arbitration recognized the right of Nicaragua to send a commissioner to the reservation to ensure the Mosquito government "does not encroach on the sovereign rights of the Republic," it was also made clear that Nicaragua had no right to interfere in the government of the reservation, politically or fiscally. In addition to these points, the statement raises a legal question concerning the right of

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Rigoberto Cabezas, Nicaragua's inspector-general on the Mosquito Coast, to declare martial law and overturn a municipal constitution which Nicaragua's National Assembly had endorsed in 1861: "With what authority can an Inspector-General declare martial law, and ignore the Government of the Reservation, the Supreme Government having acknowledged the Constitution adopted since the year 1861, and in the IIIrd Article of the Treaty of Managua 'agrees to respect, and not to interfere with, such customs and Regulations so established, or to be established, within the said district?'" The statement also reminds its recipients that Britain had given a commitment in 1867 to only accept the reservation's incorporation "if they were satisfied that such action was entirely voluntary on the part of the Indians, and that no pressure or undue influence had been exercised by them [Nicaragua] with a view to obtain their [Mosquito] consent. . . . The late proceedings of the Nicaraguan authorities have been unjust, unprecedented, and against international law."[6]

Almost a year later, Chief Clarence, now living in exile in Jamaica, continued to make similar appeals to the British foreign secretary, Lord Kimberley: "I am of opinion that Her Majesty's Government is not fully aware of the actions of the Nicaraguan Government in breaking the solemn Treaty of Managua of 28 January, 1860, and also violating the Award of the Emperor of Austria in such a dishonourable manner." Countering Nicaraguan accusations "that the Chief and Mosquito Government rebelled against the sovereignty of Nicaragua" by forcing Nicaraguan officials out of Bluefields, Chief Clarence portrays the events as being contrived by Nicaragua: "That the Nicaraguan Government, by her officers General Lacayo and General Cabezas, invaded the Mosquito Reservation on the 12 February 1894, and by an affray with their own provisional policemen caused the peaceable and law abiding inhabitants to call on me to reassume my Government in order to protect life and property and restore law and order." The dispatch ends with an appeal for British intervention given the illegal status of Nicaragua's actions: "I am assured that your Lordship is fully convinced that the steps taken by the Nicaraguan Government is unjust and illegal, and should not be tolerated by Her Majesty's Government, in which myself and people placed implicit confidence."[7]

After these initial appeals, there appears to have been a hiatus in Mosquito correspondence. Foreign Office files on the Mosquito Coast between 1895 and 1900 contain very little written by Mosquito Indians, with the exception of individuals petitioning the British vice-consul in Bluefields for financial compensation for their expulsion from the country. This absence was mirrored in the Jamaican press, with just a handful of false stories of the imminent departure of Chief Clarence for the Mosquito

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Coast. President Zelaya's initial policies had carefully avoided antagonizing North American merchants on the coast by limiting the level of new taxes and duties on imports and exports, and by promising that all locally collected revenues would be reinvested in the region (Healy 1981: 30). The imposition of higher taxes in 1898 dramatically changed the situation. The Nicaraguan governor in Bluefields refused to carry out this instruction and in February 1899 launched a revolt against Zelaya that appears to have been fully supported by North American entrepreneurs. The rebellion was easily defeated, however, and Zelaya proceeded with his plans to "fiscally incorporate" the coast. To punish the Indians over their support for the rebellion, a second Mosquito Convention was held, which removed the exemption from paying taxes and performing military service granted at the Mosquito Convention in 1894. These measures were followed in 1900 by a prohibition on educational instruction in English, which was interpreted as a direct attack on Moravian schools whose work had helped spread high rates of literacy in English and Mosquito in the main coastal towns, leaving Spanish relatively unknown to the local inhabitants (Healy 1981: 33).

Such policies ended the hiatus in Mosquito correspondence, with Foreign Office files for 1900 containing a series of petitions from Mosquito headmen outlining their ill treatment by Nicaragua and requesting the restoration of the reservation. As part of these renewed efforts, three Mosquito delegates, Lino Nelson, George Cuthbert, and Sam Pitts, were clandestinely sent to Jamaica to confer with Chief Clarence. Over the next seven years, the delegates proved to be prolific in their correspondence with the Foreign and Colonial Offices, as well as publishing regular features in the Kingston daily newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*, establishing the Mosquito Restoration Committee, and conducting two diplomatic missions to London.

On the arrival of the Mosquito delegates, Chief Clarence sent a letter to the British foreign secretary and prime minister, the Marquess of Salisbury, to inform him of the delegates' mission and once again draw his attention to Nicaragua's breach of "the solemn Treaty of 1860." Apart from providing information concerning Nicaragua's alleged oppressive behavior relating to the closure of English schools and attempts to close Moravian churches, the correspondence is interesting in that the frequent references to his "loyal subjects," "my people," and "my territory" suggests the chief presents his status as analogous to a head of state. Furthermore, the chief's invocation of notions of civilization and barbarism to underline Nicaragua's Otherness presents an inversion of a strategy which Nicaragua repeatedly directed against Mosquito Indians: "My people desire that their offsprings should be educated and taught civilized habits and not at tender years for arms to be placed in their hands, and brought up in a semi-barbarous state; and to

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this end they rely on the good offices of Her Majesty's Government to throw off the Nicaraguan yoke."[8]

On 24 August 1900, the Mosquito delegates had their first meeting with Colonial Secretary Sydney Olivier. They relayed their complaints concerning Nicaragua's breaches of the Treaty of Managua, the closing of Moravian schools, the sale of Indian lands, and the imposition of excessive taxes. They also pointed out that they had followed the advice given to them by the captain of HMS *Mohawk* in 1894 that they should "keep quiet until a constitutional Government should be settled for their province," yet six years later no such settlement had been reached. As they informed Olivier that their clandestine departure from the Mosquito Coast and their petitioning of the British government put their lives in danger, they also asked for British protection on their return to their homeland, as they feared they would be killed. While acknowledging that the delegates' fears seemed "a well-informed expectation" and expressing a paternalistic sympathy toward the "quiet and inoffensive" Mosquito people, Olivier informed them that "Great Britain could and would give them no protection, and would not interfere on their behalf with the Government of Nicaragua, being bound by her Treaties with the United States not to do so."[9]

Despite this refusal, the Mosquito delegates and Chief Clarence continued their correspondence. In January 1901, the delegates sent a detailed memorial to the new foreign secretary, the Marquess of Lansdowne, citing Nicaragua's military occupation of the reservation and what they described as the forcibly obtained consent of Mosquito headmen for incorporation as clear violations of the Treaty of Managua. The memorial also strongly asserted their shared Anglo-cultural affinities by denouncing the denial of their rights to use English in educational instruction:

> Sovereign rights were accorded to Nicaragua over the Mosquito Reservation, on the condition not inferred, but directly laid down, that the right of self-government should be retained by the inhabitants of the Reservation; and that the Reservation should not be incorporated into the Republic except by the expressed wish of the people of the Reservation. Both of these distinct provisions of the Treaty have been violated.
>
> The Reservation has been incorporated into the Republic under the style and title Department of Zelaya, and our local Government has been destroyed, and our Chief exiled, being now a pensioner upon the liberality of the English Government, while personal rights and liberties have been curtailed and oppressive taxation has been imposed.
>
> We protest that the inhabitants of the Reservation were not consulted in 1894; but that the change which then took place was effected

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> by force of arms. The inhabitants were satisfied with their local Government and had no desire to become Nicaraguans. The Sovereignty of the Republic was officially recognised, the Nicaraguan flag being hoisted with the flag of the Reservation.
>
> We protest that the forcible taking possession of our Reservation and the subsequent transformation of the same, was a flagrant breach of the Treaty rights secured by Her Majesty's Government; and as Her Majesty's Government was one of the great Contracting Parties, and has been from time immemorial the protector of the rights of the people of the Reservation, we confidently appeal to the British Government for redress.
>
> But, further, we not only ask for intervention because our political rights have been destroyed, but because of the many acts of oppression under which we suffer. Our schools have been closed, because it was impossible to teach only in the Spanish language. We speak English in Bluefields, and all along the coast it is the desire that the children should be instructed in the English language. Because we insisted upon our rights, though not refusing to have Spanish taught as a subject, our schools have been closed, and so-called Government schools, taught by teachers of loose character, have been substituted.[10]

Britain's response to the steady flow of Mosquito petitions and memorials became increasingly evasive and obfuscating, something that led to open expressions of frustration from Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates. Writing to Colonial Secretary Sidney Olivier in December 1901, the delegates demanded a clear answer to their appeals for Britain to enforce their rights under the Treaty of Managua: "We must emphatically state that we cannot abide this continued suspense, shrouded with indefiniteness, and we therefore urge for a decided answer. We know the extent of protection we claim at the hands of Britain under the Treaty; we know the extent of power delegated to Britain by that Treaty; we know the limits of Nicaraguan authority under that Treaty."[11]

Britain's reluctance to reply to Mosquito demands owed much to its resignation that the incorporation was a fait accompli. In a confidential dispatch to the Admiralty dated 20 June 1896, the Foreign Office acknowledged that Nicaragua had "exceeded its rights" under the Treaty of Managua. While Britain did not consider the treaty to have been abrogated, "it has been decided not to make any demands in the existing circumstances upon the Nicaraguan Government for a strict observance of its provisions."[12] Given this decision, Britain had surreptitiously begun negotiations to conclude a new treaty with Nicaragua that would formally

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abrogate the Treaty of Managua and recognize the reservation's incorporation into the Republic of Nicaragua.

In March 1902, Chief Clarence was informed of these negotiations by a third party, prompting him to dispatch a protest to the foreign secretary, the Marquess of Lansdowne, stating: "This incorporation has not been and never will be desired by the Mosquito Indians, and, therefore, I question the right or legality of any Treaty which in any way varies from the provisions of this particular paragraph of Managua." In an uncharacteristically critical manner, the chief also complains about Britain's moves to reach a final settlement over the reservation's status without consulting him: "Delegates and myself must not be treated in a manner that would cause us to feel that it is understood or felt that we do not rightly know what we are about, or to cause us to lose confidence in the assistance pledged by the British Government as a nation to us."[13]

The Harrison-Altamirano Treaty (1905)

In 1904, the British chargé d'affaires for Central America, Herbert Harrison, wrote an extended letter to the Marquess of Lansdowne concerning Anglo-Nicaraguan negotiations to replace the Treaty of Managua. The letter sets out the British case against Mosquito self-government. Describing the Mosquito as "timid," "cowardly," "excessively lazy," and "entirely incapable of managing their own or any other people's affairs," Harrison concluded that the least worst option for them was to come under Nicaraguan rule.[14] Britain did, however, seek concessions from Nicaragua in the form of village-level reservations where the Indians could enjoy "the rights and privileges hitherto secured to them," as well as exemptions from military service and taxation, and the reinvestment of revenues raised in the former Mosquito territory for the benefit of the local inhabitants. They also stipulated that Nicaragua make a one-off payment to Chief Clarence of £4000 on his return to Bluefields.[15] When Britain presented Nicaragua with a draft treaty, President Zelaya immediately rejected any concessions to the Mosquito Indians as curtailments of Nicaraguan sovereignty.[16] The Nicaraguan government also wanted the insertion of a clause that unequivocally renounced Britain's right to intervene on behalf of the Mosquito Indians "in order to put an end to the belief that Great Britain will continue to protect them."[17] Being aware the United States had told Britain that it expected any new treaty to "define the position of the inhabitants of the Mosquito Territory without prejudice to Nicaraguan sovereignty or territorial control," Nicaragua correctly assumed a muted response from Britain to such strong demands.[18]

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Despite repeatedly informing Chief Clarence that the new treaty being negotiated with Nicaragua would "grant important concessions by which His Majesty's Government hope that the liberty and welfare of the Indians will be secured," the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty represented a complete capitulation to Nicaraguan demands. The document abrogated the Treaty of Managua and recognized Nicaragua's absolute sovereignty over the Mosquito Reservation, with temporary concessions made to Creoles and Mosquito Indians concerning exemptions from taxes and military service. All Indian villages would be subject to the laws of the republic. The Nicaraguan government promised to establish a commission to assess claims from Mosquito communities to demarcate and legalize their ownership of the land on which they lived. Chief Clarence would be permitted to return and live as a private citizen with no mention of the payment of any allowance (Oertzen, Rossbach, and Wünderich 1990: 436–37). The treaty was signed in Managua in April 1905 by Harrison and Nicaragua's foreign minister, Adolfo Altamirano, and was fully ratified in August 1906.

On being presented with the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty, Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates sent multiple complaints to the Foreign Office in which their sense of betrayal is palpable. Writing to the Marquess of Lansdowne on the 7 June 1905, Chief Clarence reminded him that the Indians of the reservation had been armed and willing to fight Nicaragua's occupation of Bluefields in February 1894. Yet they had been persuaded not to offer any resistance by guarantees that "Great Britain would protect them if they laid down their arms, and how, after all their arms and ammunition were collected and taken on board Her Majesty's ship 'Cleopatra,' they were left defenceless, but with the promise of protection from Her Majesty's Government, and which protection they sought under their Treaty rights with Great Britain."[19]

They also complained that Britain had not complied with its treaty obligations to ensure that any incorporation of the reservation was based on the voluntary consent of the Mosquito Indians. Suggestions that such consent had been obtained were once again comprehensively rejected by the Mosquito delegates:

> We have been informed that great stress was made on an alleged incorporation, but we must reiterate that no incorporation was ever affected; for the Treaty of 1860 provides that when the Indians desire incorporation Britain would see it done in definite and unmistakable terms, and should be satisfied that neither pressure nor coercion had been brought to bear on the people of Mosquito; and the Indians have not yet desired it.[20]

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In their opposition to the new treaty, however, correspondence from Chief Clarence and the delegates exhibits a degree of contradiction in their political appeals. For example, a number of documents celebrated the fact that the Mosquito had previously lived under British sovereignty. In their appeal to the Marquess of Lansdowne, the delegates even called for the "people to be placed under a civilized government, as Great Britain or any other like nation." Such statements suggest their primary objective was to avoid Nicaraguan rule rather than championing Mosquito self-government.[21] Furthermore, given their detailed knowledge of the Treaty of Managua, Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates would have been fully aware that their suggestion to place the Mosquito people under the authority of any other nation represented a breach of the treaty which specifically prohibited the Mosquito Indians ceding the reservation to "any foreign person or State" (see Oertzen, Rossbach, and Wünderich 1990: 315).

The conclusion of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty also brought forth a rare expression of criticism in the chief's correspondence as he accused Britain of departing from the usual "diplomatic etiquette" by negotiating a treaty "without first consulting, or taking into its confidence, the recognized official head of one of the countries mostly to be affected." The chief openly stated his sense of betrayal: "His Majesty's Government should see fit to send a man-of-war to take me away from my country, keep me in enforced exile under a promise of protection, and then hand over my country to its oppressors without reference to me and regardless of my destiny."[22] Despite these criticisms, and the numerous petitions and testimonies from Mosquito headmen and the Delegates, the Foreign Office repeatedly sent almost word-for-word identical responses to all petitioners. The Foreign Office maintained that the treaty had already been signed, while reiterating that it granted "important concessions" that would secure the "liberty and welfare of the Indians."[23]

The London Delegation and the Sam Pitts Rebellion

On 22 June 1907, the *Daily Gleaner* reported that Sam Pitts and a translator called William Bent would depart for London in a final attempt to petition the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, to abandon the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty. The report states that Pitts had visited London earlier in the year, where he had spoken to the former colonial secretary to Jamaica, Sydney Olivier (*Daily Gleaner* 1907b).[24] There is no record of a meeting between Sam Pitts and Sir Edward Grey in the Foreign Office files on the Mosquito Reservation. Given that Pitts was an unofficial visitor and Sir

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Edward Grey had stepped back from some of his official duties after the death of his wife in 1906, it is unlikely the two met. One short note written by the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Charles Hardinge, provides evidence that Pitts had arrived in London and had some contact with the Foreign Office. The note, dated 22 July, informed Sir Edward Grey that two Mosquito Indians had come to London on a mission and were stranded in a penniless state. They were given financial support by unnamed individuals, and another Foreign Office official, Sir Eric Barrington, had persuaded the Treasury to pay the delegates' fare back to Jamaica.[25]

Pitts returned to Kingston on 6 September having failed in his mission. The *Daily Gleaner* reported that Pitts had had an extended conversation with Sir Edward Grey, who informed him that the British government would not renounce the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty. Pitts stated that he would return to the Mosquito Coast as soon as possible to inform the Indians of the British government's decision. The report pessimistically comments on Pitts's intended course of action: "Just what may arise from this decision remains to be seen, but it is not expected that it will tend to improve the present relations between the Mosquito Indians and the Nicaraguan Government" (*Daily Gleaner* 1907a).

Arriving at Bluefields, Pitts traveled north to his home town of Yulu (Everingham and Taylor 2009: 42). By this time, Pitts had few allies. He and the other Mosquito delegates had very publicly broken with Chief Clarence, whom they accused of giving up on the restoration cause because he was receiving a generous pension from the British while he remained in exile. Pitts had also been castigated by the powerful Moravian church, which felt that his political agitation for Mosquito restoration was jeopardizing negotiations with the Nicaraguan government to reopen Moravian schools (Rossbach 1985: 61–62). He did gain a small following among the Indians in his home town of Yulu and the neighboring villages of Twappi, Karatá, and Haulover (Rossbach 1985: 62). According to Rossbach (1985: 62–63), Pitts died during a military action to raid the government munitions store in Yulu. The Moravian mission, however, suggested that Pitts had garnered significant support among the Indians. Moravian reports describe how Pitts and his followers armed themselves with rifles and dynamite, and engaged in "mischief" that attracted the attention of the Nicaraguan garrison based at Prinzapolka. Instructed to arrest Pitts but "spare the Indians," Nicaraguan troops headed for Yulu. Pitts was eventually tracked down at Twappi, where a firefight broke out during which he was either killed or escaped badly injured and died soon afterward ("Nicaragua" 1908: 38–39). The Foreign Office files make just one short reference to the Sam Pitts Rebellion, noting:

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> In December 1907, an affray took place between some Mosquito Indians near the Wawa River and the Nicaraguan authorities. The former say that they were attacked by soldiers without provocation on the occasion of the return from London of Sam Pitts, a delegate elected by them to submit a statement of their grievances to His Majesty's Government. The latter contend that Pitts was trying to raise a revolution.
>
> Whatever may have been its origin, the émeute was very harshly repressed, and, although no actual breach of the Mosquito Treaty had occurred, I received instructions from the Foreign Office in February 1908 to express in a semi-official note the concern of His Majesty's Government at the recent occurrences, and their hope that the local authorities would be ordered to treat the Indians with humanity and consideration. Although the note was worded in very conciliatory terms, it was not well received.[26]

Less than one month later Chief Clarence was also dead, dying from a heart attack during a minor operation at the public hospital in Kingston. Although the death certificate states the cause of death as the "administering of chloroform. Predisposing causes fatty degeneration of the heart," the *Daily Gleaner* reported that during the coroner's hearing the doctor treating the chief said he had reacted violently to the administration of chloroform owing to his addiction to alcohol (*Daily Gleaner* 1908). The fate of the other delegates, Leno Nelson and George Cuthbert, remains unknown, as they disappear from paper history after 1907.

Conclusion

This article exposes a significant gap in the existing academic literature on the ethnohistory of the Mosquito Indians relating to the postincorporation era. An analysis of Mosquito diplomacy and correspondence reveals how Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates appropriated non-Indigenous resources in ways reminiscent of earlier periods of Mosquito history; seeking to navigate "between empires" in late nineteenth-century Central America. First, correspondence written by Chief Clarence and the Mosquito delegates during their exile in Jamaica shows that Mosquito Indians proved capable of navigating a hostile geopolitical terrain and pursuing their own distinct agenda. Second, despite British and Nicaraguan diplomats, naval officers, and politicians dismissing the idea that Indians were capable of governing themselves, Mosquito correspondence strongly demonstrates their ability to draw on concepts such as sovereignty, government, nationhood, and international law to legitimize their case for self-government.

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In these claims, the Mosquito strongly asserted their Anglo-cultural affinities. The cultural and legal frames that the Mosquito drew upon had their origins in the British presence on the Mosquitia. None of the archival material reviewed indicates that the Mosquito Indians contemplated drawing on the pre-reservation Indigenous political structures that had characterized the Kingdom of Mosquitia. Frequent references to the restoration of "our country" contained in correspondence from headmen, as well as from the chief and the delegates, further suggests that a nascent shared intercommunal attachment to the reservation existed among the Indians, although just how widely diffused this sentiment was remains difficult to assess.

Finally, based on a historical record of British protection, the Mosquito strongly believed their association with Britain was empowering for them in their emerging struggle against "Spaniard" Nicaraguans. Yet the diplomatic correspondence maps out a deliberate policy of obfuscation and subterfuge on the part of Great Britain to avoid giving any assistance to the Mosquito Indians. Mosquito requests for British action began to conflict with the British government's ambitions to secure a definitive withdrawal from all of its diplomatic responsibilities in Central America. Although the British had made critically important interventions on behalf of the Mosquito Indians in earlier periods, this article shows that the radical transformation of Central America's diplomatic landscape as the nineteenth century drew to a close made further intervention highly problematic. As the United States rapidly established its hegemony over the region, British power and influence inevitably waned. As such, Britain was no longer willing to get involved in disputes that not only held no strategic interest for it but also risked damaging its relations with the United States. Despite Britain's role as a historic ally of the Mosquito and its obligations as a signatory of the Treaty of Managua, under the diplomatic architecture that now governed Central America's international relations, the Mosquito Indians' association with Britain became an overwhelming disempowering factor. Under these more recent circumstances, the Mosquito's dependence on British protection ultimately served to undermine a well-informed and articulate diplomatic mission for the restoration of their reservation.

Notes

1 Award as to the Interpretation of the Treaty of Managua between the United Kingdom and Nicaragua, 2 July 1881, *Reports of International Arbitral Awards* 28:167–84, https://legal.un.org/riaa/cases/vol_XXVIII/167-184.pdf (accessed 20 April 2023).

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2 Acting Vice-Consul Hatch to Consul Bingham, Bluefields, 9 July 1894, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 2) FO 420 150 July–December 1894 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 150): 20–21.
3 Vice-Consul Harrison to Earl of Kimberley, Bluefields, 20 April 1895, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 3) FO 420 159 January–June 1895 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 159): 163.
4 Messrs. Cuthbert and Patterson to Consul Bingham, Port Limon, 7 September 1894, TNA, FO 420 159: 74–75.
5 Petition of Mr C. Patterson, Old Providence, 18 December 1894, TNA, FO 420 159: 75–76.
6 Statement of the Chief of the Mosquito Indians and Messrs. C. Patterson and J. W. Cuthbert, Bluefields, no date, TNA, FO 420 159: 76–78.
7 Chief Clarence to the Earl of Kimberley, Kingston, 21 January 1895, TNA, FO 420 159: 80–81.
8 The Chief of Mosquito Territory to the Marquess of Salisbury, Kingston, 15 August 1900, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 9) FO 420 198 1900 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 198): 20–21.
9 Mr. Olivier to Mr. Chamberlain, Jamaica, 27 August 1900, TNA, FO 420 198: 25–26.
10 Memorial: The Right Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury, Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Office, London, Kingston, 10 January 1901, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 10) FO 420 201 1901 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 201): 25–26.
11 Delegates of the Mosquito Indians to the Colonial Secretary, Jamaica, Kingston, 10 December 1901, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 11) FO 420 205 1902 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 205): 12–14. See also Chief Clarence to the Marquess of Salisbury, Kingston, 15 January 1902, TNA, FO 420 205: 21.
12 Foreign Office to Admiralty, London, 20 June 1896, TNA, FO 420 173: 36.
13 Chief of the Mosquito Reservation to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Kingston, 31 March 1902, TNA, FO 420 205: 28–30.
14 Mr. Harrison to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Managua, 7 November 1904, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 13) FO 420 223 1904 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 223): 59–60.
15 The Marquess of Lansdowne to Mr. Thornton, London, 14 March 1904, TNA, FO 420 223: 5–6.
16 Memorandum concerning the Draft Mosquito Treaties, 30 September 1904, TNA, FO 420 223: 35–36.
17 Mr. Harrison to Mr. Villiers, Managua, 2 December 1904, TNA, FO 420 223: 52.
18 Foreign Office to Colonial Office, London, 28 December 1901, TNA, FO 420 201: 66.
19 Chief Clarence to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Kingston, 7 June 1905, The National Archives, London, *Mosquito Reserve Further Correspondence* (Folder 14) FO 420 231 1905 (hereafter cited as TNA, FO 420 231): 86–87.

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20 Mosquito Delegates to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Kingston, 19 July 1905, TNA, FO 420 231: 92.
21 Mosquito Delegates to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Kingston, 19 July 1905, TNA, FO 420 231: 92.
22 Chief Clarence to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Kingston, 7 June 1905, TNA, FO 420 231: 86–87.
23 See, for example, Foreign Office to Chief Clarence, London, 29 June 1905, TNA, FO 420 231: 90.
24 Passenger records from the SS *Port Royal* and SS *Port Kingston* show that Pitts made two trips from Kingston to Bristol in 1907.
25 Charles Hardinge to Edward Grey, London, 22 July 1907, The National Archives, London, *Miscellaneous* FO 800 92 1907: 184–85.
26 General Report on the Political Situation in Central America for the year 1907, with Supplement to July 1908, Guatemala, 30 July 1908, The National Archives, London, *South and Central American and the Caribbean General* (Folder 2) FO 118 281: 13.

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